

EUROPEAN RESEARCH IN ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM
9TH CONGRESS

9TH CONGRESS



EURAU18 alicante
RETROACTIVE RESEARCH
CONGRESS PROCEEDINGS

ISBN: 978-84-1302-003-7
DOI: 10.14198/EURAU18alicante

Editor: Javier Sánchez Merina
Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)



Titulación de Arquitectura

ESCUELA POLITÉCNICA SUPERIOR Alicante University

Carretera San Vicente del Raspeig s/n 03690 San Vicente del Raspeig. Alicante (SPAIN)

eurau@ua.es

The Collaborative City

How to develop urban project considering expanded and inedited fields?

Baron, Guillaume¹

1. Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture Paris-La Villette, Paris, France,
office@baron-arch.eu

Synopsis

This paper draws a link between citizens' initiative, architectural practice and architectural education. The core of this research focuses on "bottom-up" design processes, which may illustrate the paradigm of an inedited "collaborative city" characterized by a wider stakeholders' involvement.

The first part defines the theoretical conditions for a new paradigm, "a new system of values, that illustrate a new representation of the world, in a new coherent system" by analysing a corpus of recent completions where stakeholders' status, type of financing and duration reverse the traditional "top-down" process of designing projects. But those examples don't identify the architect as the central character of this inedited process, that's why the second part of this "retroactive research" paper develops personal project where the architect gathers various disciplines within an integrative process of design, where the collaborative economy acts as a generator to face the velocity of urban degeneration of two suburban cities of Paris. The third part sheds light on architectural education and pedagogical experimentations, which prepare future architects to play a central role in a collaborative process where methodologies of design and extra-architectural alliances look more relevant than preconceived aesthetical and theoretical positions.

Finally, the paper concludes with a categorization of skills taken from our previous examples, and argues that if architects want to be play a major role in urban design, architecture academies should immediately integrate those competences to their curriculum.

Key words: Bottom-up initiative, collaborative economy, architectural education, French suburbs.

1. Introduction

Traditional design process of urbanization looks henceforth behind us. The usual top-down decision processes seem to have been replaced by more integrative ones, which gather an increasing amount of stakeholders around the table. Behind those observations, the knowledge taught in academies of architecture remains immediately in question.

The traditional “triumvirate” of client, architect and companies is now enlarged to non-professional (i.e. users and associative), or extra-professional (such as specialists of inedited fields), to create a bottom-up process of urban renewal, making more evident the “heterogeneous engineering” (Boudon) of the architectural design. From this point forward, new notions appear in the vocabulary of the design process: citizens consultation and negotiations for the “process” itself, space sharing and crowdfunding for “self-financing”, reuse and recycling for the “building”. Is this ongoing phenomenon just a short-term tendency, or is it drastically changing our habits in terms of design to finally erect more integrative process and more hospitable cities. This paper wants to explore this hypothesis by borrowing three different points of view.

Firstly, as an observer and scholar, we will exhume specific and recent urban “bottom-up” completions to interrogate their starting-point, their financing and their duration. Can we consider these selected initiatives, which illustrate “architecture without architects”, as evidence of a new paradigm of the city?

Secondly, as a “research by design” practitioner, we will present a methodology we submitted to re-develop a 150 ha territory located in the vulnerable suburban cities of Grigny and Ris-Orangis, located 30km from Paris, France. By introducing an unedited field (the collaborative economy) as generator of the project, we defend more integrative processes where architects act as instigators for a more ethical urban renewal.

Thirdly, as a teacher, we will focus on innovative pedagogies which illustrate how the paradigm of the collaborative city can enter into the Architectural Education, and describe the main mechanisms employed by institutions to help the students to face the uncertain but exciting evolution of the role of the architects.

Finally, this paper concludes on the competences required by the “collaborative city” which definitively has to enter into academics curriculum if future architects want to play a crucial and central role in urban design.

2. Is the “collaborative city” a new paradigm for developing the city?

According to various meanings, “paradigm” is defined by several criteria: it is based on a new system of values that illustrate a new representation of the world, to shape a new coherent system. On the other hand, the expression “collaborative city” here represents all “bottom-up” initiatives launched by alternative process of urbanization, in opposition to the traditional and historical top-down process within which public institutions act as drivers. The following cases constitute a part of a wider corpus which may illustrate this changing of paradigm, whose analysis focuses on major components of a possible new and coherent representation of the city: the status of their instigator, their process of financing and their duration.

2.1. “La Ferme du Bonheur”, Nanterre, France: an unexpected cultural equipment

This first example will detail how a personal initiative, launched in 1990' by a charismatic artist, become the starting point of a still running process of transformation of a disaffected building in a suburban city of Paris. The relative ambitious project started by defining cultural activities (theatre, exhibitions), which progressively found its public and users, becoming a place of reference for experimental artistic production. By progressively expanding its activities, The Ferme du Bonheur (*English translation: The Farm of Happiness*) hosts now a laboratory for urban agriculture, develops alternatives to the traditional economy and fosters educational connections with the University of Paris Agro Tech, which finally tend to promote a resilient occupancy of undervalued vacant spaces within the city.

2.2. “La Louve”, Paris, France: new amenities and crowdfunding

“We were unhappy about the current food amenities, so we decided to create our own store” said the creator of the supermarket “La Louve”, opened in 2017 in the XVIIIth district of Paris. Whereas the major retail companies promote generic products disconnected from the social conditions of the neighbourhood where they are located, a crowdfunding was launched to create the first “cooperative supermarket” of Paris. Lower price are promoted for all members of the association, who then take part to all logistic and administrative duties. Giving time to the community makes affordable prices. This example shows how a well-organized group playing a social role can reshape a territory.

2.3. “Les Grands Voisins”, Paris, France: temporary urbanism

The third example sheds light of the notion of temporary urbanism. Les “Grands Voisins” is an experience of associative occupancy of the former hospital “Saint-Vincent-de-Paul”, located in the central XIVth district of Paris, which integrates its own end from the beginning of the project. Diverse occupancies scheduled by the Association “Plateau Urbain” will last until June 2019: co-working spaces, bars, bakery, restaurants, second-hand shops, emergency housings, take place in recycled buildings, thanks to light and ephemeral spatial interventions. Such a process responds to real citizens needs and introduces a crucial reflexivity between the space and its uses, while bringing urban life in a place waiting for its final destination.

2.4. First conclusion: the collaborative process as a realistic alternative to top-down process

These collaborative processes, usually embraced under the expression “bottom-up initiative” may be considered as a change of paradigm since they illustrate an explorative, recurrent and successful mutation of the traditional design process: new alliances (La Ferme du Bonheur), new types of financing (La Louve), new vision of the duration (Les Grands Voisins). Because they may also constitute a strong alternative to heavy and slow transformation of the city (today unable to quickly react to the velocity of the needs), they naturally interrogate the architectural practice.

3. The “New Prosperities” project: a collaborative practice to shape a road-map of urban renewal by introducing the collaborative economy as generator

The 14th session of the EUROPAN competition has been launched in 2017 under the theme “Productive Cities”. The main hypothesis of the organizers was to consider cities as a favourable territory to develop new processes of planning, and the word “productive” is wide enough to interrogate both the territory and the economical context which gives birth to the projects. We took part to this competition for the site of Ris-Orangis – Grigny (France), two neighbouring cities characterized by their social fragility. Consequently, this part of the paper focuses on a “research by design” three-steps methodology to introduce, from the beginning of a process of design, economic fields architects traditionally pained to consider as crucial.

3.1. Step 1: The Capitalization of datas to define an accurate strategy

The first step initiates a collective work with various stakeholders to gain a better economic and social vision of the territories. Successive workshops gather heterogeneous council of inhabitants, associative, politic and economic stakeholders which all have an experience of the site, in order to define priorities in terms of needs, times, stakes (transportation, food, jobs etc.). To animate those 4 workshops, architects call specific experts to manage with the heterogeneity of the needs and to launch a bottom-up project. Following topics are embraced:

- Create and integrate a citizen council;
- Define economic growth;
- Define property and sharing;
- Connect the territory to the Metropolis of Grand-Paris.

3.2. Step 2: Site’s mutation. How to achieve the strategy?

The second step of the New Prosperities road-map organizes all the collected “substance” according to the 4 sectors of the collaborative economy (Demailly, 2015) and refers to paradigmatic cities:

- Production, with a “Business to Consumer” strategy (reference: Seoul, South-Corea);
- Consumption: with cultivable area dedicated to affordable and wealthy food (reference: Detroit, USA);
- Education and culture: by involving public stakeholders (reference: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil);
- Crowdfunding: by implementing some clusters (reference: Roxbury, USA).

3.3. Step 3: Process of construction, at a metropolitan scale

As a final step, the “New Prosperities” road-map integrates the project within the global territory of the Metropolis of Grand Paris, by focusing on topics belonging to a wider-scale:

- Improving the Urban metabolism;
- Building recycling;
- Re-using;
- Short-processes.

3.4. Second conclusion: can architects be the instigator of the collaborative city?

This methodology of work shows how the starting point of a relevant urban project launched by architects and urbanists doesn't borrow any spatial or architectural references but focuses on an extra-architectural subject, the collaborative economy, to face urban and social degradation. This methodology actually underlines the competences of the architects, and their relative position within a design process, which finally interrogates their own architectural education.

4. How the “collaborative city” interacts with the architectural education?

Architectural education, whose *“purpose is not only to educate architects, but intellectuals holding ethic and moral conscience”* (Snozzi), is characterized by subjective and recurrent deep questioning. In the meantime, it is supported by teachers who can be scholars or practitioner, defending various or individual doctrines. Nevertheless, all architecture academies tends to mirror the evolution of the practices and help students to face the rising complexity of their coming professional carrier. This third part illustrates three pedagogical experiences borrowed to architectural education, related to the so-called notion of Live Projects, to respond to the constant changing of the profession of architects.

4.1. “Rural Studio”, Alabama, USA: Make architects and architecture more accessible to people

The Rural Studio is somehow the most achieved educational experience, launched in 1993 in the Hale County (USA) as an undergraduate program from the Auburn University. The studio aims to help underserved population and become progressively a laboratory for all the matters of recycling, re-using, remaking, which can be considered, 25 years later, as a precursor of a new kind of practice which appears today as relevant.

4.2. “Lampedusa Workshop”, Paris, France: Refugees crisis enters into the architectural education

This pedagogical workshop took place in 2016 within the Master of the Urban School of Sciences-Po, Paris. It gathered group of students and representatives of the City of Lampedusa (Italia), who are currently facing massive waves of refugees. Production of students consisted in a site analysis, detailed perspectives providing a better organisation of this strategic territory, and may prepare the students to be quickly reactive in producing solutions required by geopolitical crisis.

4.3. “It won't exist without inhabitants”, Paris, France: Invite inhabitants within the architectural studio

The purpose of this master, which took place in the Architecture School of Paris-La-Villette (where we are teaching), from 2013 to 2017, was to train students to the dialogue with non-professional stakeholders, whose requests are not explicitly formulated. This example shows how new kind of skills can be taught, like the cooperation and the negotiation, which are currently unexplored within the traditional configuration of the architectural studio (Hoddé, 2013).

4.4. Third conclusion: pedagogy and social skills

Inedited pedagogical experiences borrowing real cases (a never affordable architecture, a refugee crisis, the disconnection to real people and real voices) are relevant examples of what an architectural education should be. Beyond this specific context of creation, they interrogate the skills and knowledge, which must now be taught within the studio, making the students more prepared to assume their social role within the society.

5. Final conclusion

Observing urban inedited experiences (part 1), detailing a specific methodology of practice (part 2) and analysing some spatial education tentatives (part 3) gave the opportunity to recenter bottom-up initiatives within a more universal critical process, and finally consider the collaborative process as an inedited path for designing the renewal of the city. Beyond those specific cases, these initiatives also interrogate the skills which are here embraced.

Various classifications of skills have been defined (Hoddé 2001, Salama 2015): theoretical, practical and social are the mains categories, but as far as the social ones are concerned, it sounds that the attached pedagogy is only at the beginning of its development. Neither the architecture academies nor the architects tend to consider them as crucial for urban projects, even if major architecture completions and visible pedagogical experiences clearly illustrate the contrary.

6. Bibliography

- MARIE-HELENE BACQUE AND CAROLE BIEWENER, *L'empowerment, une pratique émancipatrice ?*, La Découverte, Paris, 2015
- HELENE BALAZARD, *Agir en démocratie*, Les éditions de l'Atelier/Editions Ouvrières, Ivry-sur-Seine, 2015
- GUILLAUME BARON, "Building the city on the city itself", in *Rethinking, Reinterpreting and Restructuring Composite Cities*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017
- JAMES BENEDICT BROWN, "A critique of the live project", School of Planning, Architecture & Civil Engineering, Queen's University Belfast, 2012
- MIKE DAVIS, *Le pire des mondes possibles*, La Découverte, Paris, 2006
- DAISY FROUD AND HARRIET HARRISS, *Radical Pedagogies*, RIBA Publishing, London, 2015
- FEDERICA GATTA, "Tactiques et formes d'engagement des acteurs non institutionnels de la transformation urbaine", in Biau, Véronique, Fenker, Michael, Macaire, Elise, *L'implication des habitants dans la fabrication de la ville*, Cahier Ramau numéro 6, Editions de la Villette, Paris, 2013
- RAINIER HODDE, "Inviter l'habitant dans l'enseignement, un dispositif pour apprendre à concevoir autrement", in Biau, Véronique, Fenker, Michael, Macaire, Elise, *L'implication des habitants dans la fabrication de la ville*, Cahier Ramau numéro 6, Editions de la Villette, Paris,
- RAINIER HODDE AND GUILLAUME BARON, "Apprendre à concevoir : une demarche pédagogique à partir d'opérations de conception" in Cohen Claude, Devisme Laurent, *L'architecture et l'urbanisme au miroir des formations*, Cahier Ramau numéro 9, Editions de la Villette, Paris, 2018
- LES ECONOMISTES ATTERRES, *Changer d'avenir, Réinventer le travail et le modèle économique*, Ed. Les Liens qui Libèrent, Lonrai, 2017
- MARCOS L. ROSA AND UTE E. WEILAND, *Handmade Urbanism, From Community Initiatives to Participatory Models*, Jovis Verlag GmbH, Berlin, 2013
- ROBERT SAMPSON, *Great American Cities, Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2012.

Biography

Guillaume Baron. Architect d.p.l.g. (certified by the French government) who graduated from the Ecole Nationale d'Architecture Paris-Malaquais in 2006. He founded BARON arch., a studio of architectural and urban practices and theoretical research in Paris in 2012. The office extends its fields from residential renovations to urban renewal projects, integrating social awareness and collaborative process as leitmotiv. Both latest projects have been honoured by a special mention (European 13) and shortlisted (European 14).

Previously, Guillaume Baron worked for 3 years for the Japanese firm SANAA, run by Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa, winner of the 2010 Pritzker Prize. Since 2013, he has been teaching at the Ecole Nationale d'Architecture Paris-la-Villette, in the Department of Theory and Practice of Urban and Architectural Design.